

Priority Goals & Actions

Improving Recreational Opportunities

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and its partners are constantly working to improve recreational opportunities on public lands. To do this, WDNR staff members develop long-term plans, in which they make decisions, with citizen and partner input, about public lands and facilities. One example is the Black River State Forest Master Plan, which is scheduled to be updated in 2003. Plans like this one describe long- and short-term goals for increasing accessibility and managing land and water

resources, based on user trends. With the support of these plans, the WDNR can begin the work of improving recreational opportunities.

The WDNR works to improve accessibility of recreational opportunities by building and maintaining boat landings, making areas and activities handicap accessible, and constructing parking lots in or near public areas. The staff tries to improve the experience that a particular site offers by maintaining trails and campsites, building informational facilities

and wildlife viewing towers, managing public waters and lands for fish and wildlife, and providing educational resources.

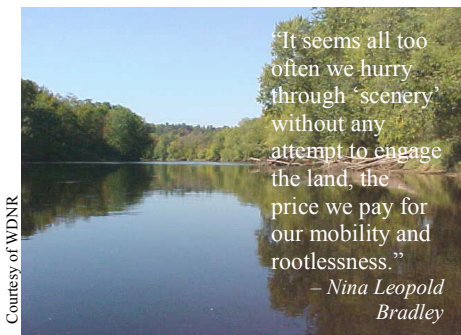
Public lands in the Black-Buffalo-Trempealeau River Basin take many forms. There are state trails, parks, and forests, wildlife and natural areas, and fishery areas. In many of these, additional trails of all kinds can be found, as well as campsites, boat landings, and more. In addition, county lands in each of the counties in the basin provide similar activities and are frequently connected to state land. Hunting and fishing are legal on most public lands during designated times of the year.

According to *Wisconsin DNR's Public Wildlife Recreation Land*, "Since 1876, the State of Wisconsin has been acquiring land to meet conservation and recreation needs. As of 1996, more than 1,290,000 acres have been acquired for use by all Wisconsin citizens and our state's visitors." About 8% of that public land is found in the BBT, an area covering only 6% of the state. This places a huge demand on the recreational resources of the area, but the public lands, waters, and facilities help to support that demand. Keep reading to find out how.

In the Black-Buffalo-Trempealeau River Basin, there are:

- ➔ Nearly 1600 acres of state park lands.
- ➔ Approximately 67,000 acres of state forest land.
- ➔ Almost 600 acres of land related to state trails.
- ➔ About 6500 acres of fishery areas.
- ➔ Over 21,000 acres of wildlife areas.

For a grand total of nearly 100,000 acres of state-owned public land and easements – in addition to almost 200,000 acres of local county land and nearly 300,000 acres of federally-owned land – where Wisconsin residents and visitors can go camping, fishing, hunting, canoeing, hiking, biking, skiing, and lots more.



Courtesy of WDNR

Fishery Areas

State fishery areas serve many purposes, mostly recreational and protective. Its protective purposes include:

- ➡ Acting as buffers against conflicting land practices.
- ➡ Preserving headwaters and springs that are the sources for high-quality streams.
- ➡ Protecting and improving spawning grounds for lakes.
- ➡ Preventing, like wildlife areas, the blocking off of important land and water.

Rules for the different fishery areas may vary depending on whether the WDNR owns the fee title or easement on the property. Easements can allow fishing, hunting, trapping, or any combination of them. All of their boundaries are clearly marked and the boundary markers explain what uses are allowed.

Public fishing is not limited to state fishery areas however. All navigable waterways, rivers, lakes, and streams – except some private flowages and ponds where access is limited by private property – belong to the public at large, which means that anyone may legally fish in them, during the appropriate seasons. The only catch is that the public must “keep their feet wet.” Even uninhabited shorelines are considered private property and therefore users of the waterways should not set foot on them without the owner’s consent, unless it is to get around obstructions like downed trees or rocks.

Tank Creek Fishery Area, located in Jackson County southeast of Hixton, protects Tank Creek, a trout stream flowing into the Trempealeau River. The area surrounding the creek includes 471 acres of marsh and upland forest, which act as excellent buffers for the creek and create habitat for the trout. Parking areas are available.

The creek itself is a popular fishing site for local anglers. Pools and riffles as well as undercut banks and streambank grasses provide good places for fish to hide. Also a number of gravel beds provide a place for trout to spawn, though like many streams in the area, most of the stream bed is sand covered. Most of the trout found in the stream are brook trout, though some brown trout can be caught. To supplement the native population, it is stocked with trout regularly.

The WDNR identified Tank Creek as a valuable stream to protect, in part because of its quality and in part because of its popularity among local anglers. Not all of the land (or easements) within the project boundary are owned by the state, but staff continue to watch properties in that area so that the stream can be protected and fished for generations to come.

The 13 fishery areas in the basin make up a total of about 6500 acres.

	Acres*	Other Recreation**					
		Hiking	Birdwatching	Berry picking	Mushroom hunting	Trout fishing	Fishing (general)
Albion Rearing Station	65		X	X			
Big Creek Fishery Area	1316					X	
Buffalo River Fishery Area	1291	X		X		X	
Dickinson Creek Fishery Area	80					X	
King Creek Fishery Area	127					X	
Lowe Creek Fishery Area	95	X		X			
Northland Lake Fishery Area	575	X		X			
Sand Creek Fishery Area	710	X		X		X	
Stockwell Creek Fishery Area	798	X		X		X	
Tank Creek Fishery Area	471	X		X		X	
Trempealeau Lakes Fishery Area	164						X‡
Trempealeau River (N. Branch) Fishery Area	374	X		X		X	
Trump Lake Fishery Area	424	X		X	X		

* some state owned, federally owned, county owned, state easement
 ** denotes recreation other than hunting and trapping
 ‡ pier available for disabled fishing

Table 3 – Fishery Areas

Macroinvertebrate – animals that have no backbone but are visible without magnification.

What the WDNR Is Doing

The WDNR, including Fisheries staff, Regional Field staff, and Water Quality staff, work hard in state fishery areas, monitoring streams. The Fisheries crews spend a great deal of time shocking for fish to get an estimate of what types of fish are present and how well they are growing and reproducing. With the help of Regional Field staff, they stock streams that can support certain fish but lack natural reproduction. In this way, recreational use is allowed to continue while the crews work to improve stream quality, if possible.

Water Quality staff monitor the streams, but in a different way. They take samples of stream water and test it for things like bacteria, temperature, dissolved oxygen levels, and flow. Other times, they take macroinvertebrate samples in the surrounding areas, because the type of insects present can tell a lot about the quality of the water in the stream.

In order to maintain or improve the quality of a stream, it is important to protect the quality of its tributaries. This is where Water Management Specialists come in. They regulate shoreline and floodplain development and any alterations to the streambeds and lakes themselves. For example, a tributary to Tank Creek was recently impounded on someone's property. That impoundment slowed the flow of the water, which in turn slowed the flow of Tank Creek. As it did so, the water warmed up, which is detrimental for Tank Creek's trout population. The dam also prevents trout spawning, because they frequently swim upstream into the tributaries in the fall to spawn. WDNR staff is requiring the property owner to remove the dam, which was never permitted, to protect the quality of the tributary and thereby protect Tank Creek.

What You Can Do

- ➡ Pick up a copy of *Wisconsin DNR's Public Wildlife Recreation Land*. With it, you can find fishery areas all over the basin and the state. Visit any WDNR service center to get your copy.
- ➡ Take an angler education class. To find out more, visit <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/fish/anglered/anglered.htm>>.
- ➡ Contact the local WDNR service center to find out more about specific fishery areas. WDNR service centers in the BBT are located in Alma, Black River Falls, and La Crosse.
- ➡ Work with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to restore or improve native habitats for fish and wildlife on your property. They can provide expertise and some funding. To find out more, visit <<http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/wacademy/fund/fishwildlife.html>>.
- ➡ Visit the Upper Mississippi River or Trempealeau national wildlife refuges. These public lands offer nearly 250,000 acres of recreational opportunities.
- ➡ Visit a fishery area or any stream in the basin. Go fishing, canoeing, hunting, trapping, hiking, berry, nut, or mushroom picking, and so much more. Follow the regulations for each individual property and enjoy!

Public Forests

Wisconsin's state forests differ from its state parks in that they are managed not only for recreational use, but also for forest management and production. While both parks and forests have recreational facilities like trails and campgrounds, forests have huge sections that are maintained for the purpose of selling forestry products like pulpwood or board lumber. These areas also serve the public as models of sound forestry practices.

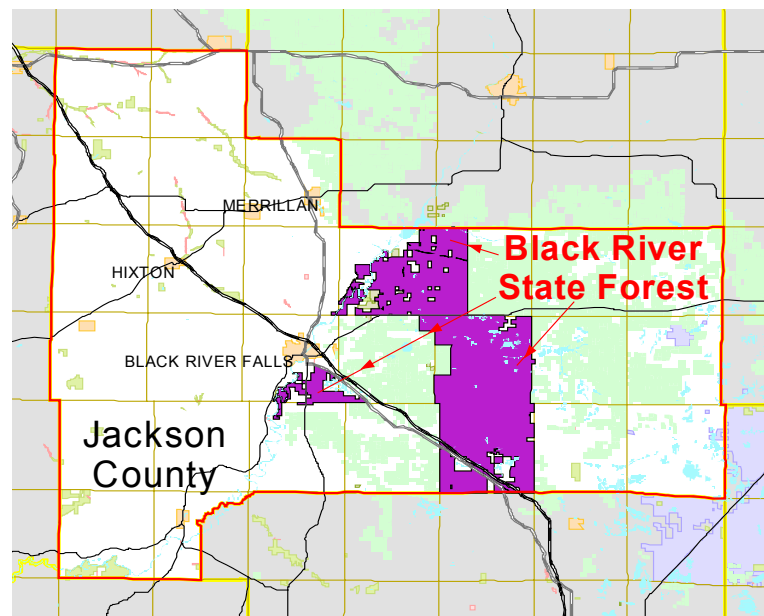
In the 1950s, the Federal government conducted a bailout for failing farmers in western Jackson County whose farms were not succeeding on the sandy acidic soil. The government bought the failing farmland and placed it in the care and ownership of the state of Wisconsin. In 1957, the state established the Black River State Forest with 59,000 acres of restored land ("BRSF," 2000).

Today, the state forest encompasses 67,000 acres in the county and includes within its boundaries Castle Mound Park and Dike 17 Wildlife Area. There are three major aspects to the management of the Black River State Forest: recreation, timber management, and natural areas.

The recreational aspect of the forest can be easily recognized year round. Trails provide hundreds of miles of fun throughout the area. Campsites abound for all purposes – horse camping, group camping, handicapped camping, and backpack camping. Hunting is allowed at designated times in designated areas of the forest. Wildlife and bird watching, canoeing, fishing, berry and mushroom picking; the possibilities are endless.

Timber management, as state above, is one major part of what separates state forests from state parks. WDNR staff practice sustainable forestry, meaning they take advantage of renewable forest products. Trees in the forest, typically jack pine, oak, and white pine in this forest, are cut in such a way that encourages natural regeneration whenever possible, and when this is not sufficient, seedlings are planted. Also, the forest lands are managed to work as ecosystems, rather than to maintain certain species. In these ways, the forestry staff is working to make sure that there is a functioning forest for generations to come.

Natural areas, though a smaller part of the forest, are no less important. About 800 acres are designated natural areas intended to preserve specific important ecosystems. Some of these are possible old growth forests or contain rare plant species. Public use is generally not encouraged in natural areas to protect these rare communities, but certain uses like hiking or educational programs are allowed.



LEGEND

- Major Highways
- Interstate Highways
- US Highways
- State Trunk Highways
- USGS Open Water
- Township Range Lines
- County Boundaries
- County Forests
- American Indian Lands
- Municipalities
- DNR Managed Lands
- Ownership
- Easement
- Lease



Figure 14 – Black River State Forest

The Black River State Forest attracted:

189,126 visitors in 1970
288,300 visitors in 1980
238,311 visitors in 1990

Today, the state forest attracts over 300,000 visitors annually.

Amenities to be found in the Black River State Forest:

- ➡ Campsites (98), including winter, backpack, horse, and handicap accessible camping
- ➡ Picnic Areas, including handicap accessible picnic areas
- ➡ Scenic vistas
- ➡ Lookout tower
- ➡ Shoreline
- ➡ Canoeing
- ➡ Boat launches
- ➡ Fishing
- ➡ Self-guided nature trails (3 miles)
- ➡ ATV trails (96 miles – combined with Jackson County Forest)
- ➡ Hiking trails (27 miles)
- ➡ Horse trails (34 miles)
- ➡ Mountain bike trails (33 miles)
- ➡ Snowmobile trails (51 miles)
- ➡ Cross-country ski trails (32 miles)

What the WDNR Is Doing

In 2003, the master planning process begins for the Black River State Forest. In this twenty-year plan, staff, partners, and the general public will draw up their goals for the state forest. Among these goals will likely be timber management and recreation goals, and discussions of how integrated management of forest resources can take place for the benefit of wildlife and fisheries as well as public recreation.

In the state forest, the staff must enforce the rules of the forest for the safety of all the users. Forest rangers make sure that trails and designated use areas are being used as they are intended to be used, that hunters are following seasons and hunting in designated areas, and that natural areas are not being misused or abused in any way. Also, to enhance the public's experience in the forest, the staff makes sure facilities, including campsites, trails, and parking lots are in good condition.

A team of foresters in the WDNR ensures a sustainable forest for revenue. These foresters also work with wildlife biologists to sustain ecosystems that depend on large expanses of forested land to survive and with fisheries staff to implement watershed friendly forestry practices. Ideally, the forest should be a complement to other resources and vice versa, and WDNR foresters are working toward that goal.

Finally, with so much forest land in one area, especially keeping in mind the many thousands of acres of county forest land to the west of the state forest, forest fire protection is essential. Lookout towers are strategically placed in the forest and staffed during the fire season. WDNR fire crews are regularly training and working with the fire equipment so that they are ready in the event of a forest fire.

As 2003 approaches and the master planning process is about to begin, WDNR staff is even more aware of what makes an experience in the state forest positive for the public. All of these things will be kept in mind when they begin to set new goals for the state's forest.

What You Can Do

- ➡ Kids can become Junior Rangers/Wisconsin Explorers, parent-child discovery programs in Wisconsin's state parks and forests. Adults can get involved as teachers/group leaders too. To find out more, go to <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/interp/jrwe.html>>, write to Bureau of Parks and Recreation, Department of Natural Resources, PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707, or call (608) 266-0229.
- ➡ Join or help form a Friends group. To learn more, go to <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/voljobs/friends.html>>.
- ➡ Become a part of the Black River Forest Trail Foundation and help enhance the trails through public awareness and fundraising. To get involved, call the forest superintendent at (715) 284-1406.
- ➡ If you have suggestions for the State Forest, please let the WDNR Lands and Forestry Team know. Call the Black River Falls Service Center at (715) 284-1400.

Wildlife Areas

In the BBT, numerous wildlife areas protect valuable wetlands for the sake of the wetlands, for that of the waterfowl and other wildlife that depend on them, and for the sake of those people who have a deep appreciation for both. They also prevent the private damming of high-quality waterways and blocking off of important lands.

Unlike state parks and forests, they lack the development of facilities. They retain their natural appearance because they do not have designated roads or trails, public restroom facilities, or buildings. Most do not even have campsites on the property.

Forested wildlife areas are not actively managed for their forest products, though they are occasionally managed for fire safety and to create habitat. Harvesting, such as clear cuts and thinning, can be done to maintain healthy forest growth since other natural events which manage the forest, like fire, are suppressed. Management to create habitat can support valuable wildlife species to maintain a balanced ecosystem within the area.

“State wildlife areas were acquired to preserve an important American heritage of wild lands and wild things for hunters, trappers, hikers, wildlife watchers and all people interested in the out-of-doors.”

– Wisconsin DNR's Public Wildlife Recreation Land

The 18 wildlife areas in the BBT cover a total of 21,247 acres.

Big Swamp Wildlife Area is currently under consideration for further protection through the Land Legacy Plan. This protection will likely be an expansion of the project boundaries. The wildlife area now has less than a quarter mile frontage on a road, so access is limited. In the past, the WDNR leased land from nearby private owners to increase access, but recently those landowners have chosen not to renew those leases because of hunting pressures on the land.

Another reason that expansion could increase the usability of the area is that it is primarily wetland with little or no upland access. Uplands would also help protect the wetlands by creating a buffer where development could not occur. One side of the property is also farmed heavily with horseradish. This area has been drained to make agriculture possible, and is currently eligible as a wetland mitigation site.

Big Swamp Wildlife Area is part of the former path of the Buffalo River where it ran into the lower Chippewa River before the time of the glaciers. Something during that period diverted its path so it flows to the Mississippi instead. Besides its unique geological history, Big Swamp is home to one of the largest tamarack bogs in the driftless area. The bogs are usually found further north and are rare in this area (Linderud, 2001).

* some state owned, federally owned, county owned, state easement
** denotes recreation other than hunting and trapping, which are available in all wildlife areas

	Acres*	Other Recreation**								
		Hiking	Birdwatching	Berry picking	Nut picking	Mushroom hunting	Trout fishing	Fishing (general)	Canoeing	XC skiing
* some state owned, federally owned, county owned, state easement ** denotes recreation other than hunting and trapping, which are available in all wildlife areas										
Big Swamp Wildlife Area	1900		X							
Borst Valley Wildlife Area	994			X		X	X			X
Central Wisconsin Conservation Area - Jackson Unit	1682	X		X						
Chimney Rock Wildlife Area	614			X		X				X
Dike 17	3700	X	X	X				X		X
Lakes Coulee Wildlife Area	589			X	X	X				
Morgan Marsh Wildlife Area	192									
North Bend Bottoms Wildlife Area	1900	X		X				X	X	
Owen Wildlife Area	135		X							
South Beaver Creek Wildlife Area	1216	X		X		X				
Sportsman's Lake	1200		X					X		
Tamarack Creek Wildlife Area	542			X			X			
Tollefson Marsh Wildlife Area	120	X	X	X						
Van Loon Wildlife Area	3981	X						X	X	
Vosse Coulee Wildlife Area	123						X			
Washington Coulee Wildlife Area	87.6						X			
West Taylor Wildlife Area	98	X		X						
Whitman Dam Wildlife Area	2173		X					X	X	

Table 4 – Wildlife Areas

What the WDNR Is Doing

Currently, most of the wildlife areas have designated project boundaries, but the state does not own all of the land within the boundary. So, one major area that the WDNR is working on is purchasing land or easements within the designated areas. The property owners are not pressured in any way, but reminded periodically that when they are ready to sell their land or easements on it, the WDNR is interested.

The staff also encourages visitors, while in the wildlife areas, to respect the wildlife and the other users they find there.

- ➡ Only observe animals from a distance. This is for individual safety, that of the other users, and the wildlife.
- ➡ Do not pick flowers or other plant life; it may be rare or animals that depend on it may be rare.
- ➡ Be tolerant of other users. At times, conflicts arise between uses, but everyone has an equal right to use wildlife areas for the types of recreation allowed in them.

Finally, the WDNR is responsible for management of the land itself. Unlike management at the state forest, wildlife areas are managed specifically for the health of wildlife. Timber and recreation are important, but they are managed in ways that support wildlife communities. For example, recreational hunting can work to manage populations and bird watching has little or no impact on the wildlife. Timber is maintained to meet the needs of the surrounding wildlife while protecting the health of the forest. Fisheries staff also works in wildlife areas monitoring streams to ensure water quality and that the fishery is maintained or improved.

What You Can Do

- ➡ Pick up a copy of *Wisconsin DNR's Public Wildlife Recreation Land*. With it, you can find wildlife areas all over the basin and the state. Visit any WDNR service center to get your copy.
- ➡ Work with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to restore or improve native habitats for fish and wildlife on your property. They can provide expertise and some funding. To find out more, visit <<http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/wacademy/fund/fishwildlife.html>>.
- ➡ Visit the Upper Mississippi River or Trempealeau national wildlife refuges, offering nearly 250,000 acres of recreational opportunities.
- ➡ Visit a wildlife area. Go canoeing, fishing, hunting, trapping, hiking, berry, nut, or mushroom picking, and much more.
- ➡ Contact the local WDNR service center to find out more about specific wildlife areas. WDNR service centers in the BBT are located in Alma, Black River Falls, and La Crosse.
- ➡ Teachers, learn about Project Wild activity guide (K-12). Call (850) 488-4679 or write Project Wild, Office of Informational Services, Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, 620 South Meridian Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399-1600.
- ➡ For wildlife publications, contact the UW-Extension by calling (877) 947-7827 or visiting <<http://www1.uwex.edu/ces/pubs>>.

Create your own wildlife area. Find out about available cost sharing opportunities at your county NRCS office or visit <<http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov/>>. Cost sharing is possible for things like:

- ➡ Wetland restoration and wildlife habitat establishment under the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).
- ➡ Tree planting, wildlife ponds, and grass cover under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).
- ➡ Seeding, fencing, prairie restoration, in stream structures, and more under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

State Parks

Almost no limit can be placed on the number of activities one can take part in during a stop at one of Wisconsin's state parks. Canoeing, hiking, visiting interpretive centers, and bird watching are only a few. The Black-Buffalo-Trempealeau River Basin has two parks in the State Park System: Merrick State Park and Perrot State Park. Both Perrot and Merrick State Parks were created from land purchased and donated by a wealthy Winona, Minnesota businessman named John Latsch.

In 1918, Perrot State Park was established with camping facilities and trails to hike. Perrot even offers Voyageurs Canoe Trail, a 3.4-mile route providing a view of Trempealeau Mountain – the namesake of the nearby town and the county – from the water. Other amenities include a number of bluffs and ridges with hiking and cross-country skiing trails meandering up and around them. The Riverview Trail, 2.5 miles long, lives up to its name with openings in the surrounding woods to view the Great River.

Located adjacent the Great River State Trail and the Trempealeau Wildlife Refuge, there is so much to do at Perrot State Park, users might not know where to start. One good place to begin though might be the interpretive center. The center is designed to help park visitors get the most out of the experience, from recognizing the plants and wildlife around the park to understanding how the geological formations got there.

Merrick State Park, established in 1932, is tucked between 500-foot bluffs and the Mississippi River. Backwater sloughs separate the park from the river itself, but 23 of 66 campsites are right on the backwater, and river access is available for those who want to try to navigate the strong currents. The park is also located in the area of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, so there are great opportunities for seeing large and small migratory birds stopping on their long trips for a rest.

The park has many programs to offer like guided or self-guided hikes, interpretive centers, and school programs. Also, ice fishing is popular on the backwater, as are snowshoeing and cross-country skiing in the winter.

The Wisconsin State Parks System was in the final four for the 2001 State Park Gold Medal Award.

Perrot State Park attracted:

170,915 visitors in 1970
328,243 visitors in 1990
208,537 visitors in 2000

Merrick State Park attracted:

94,595 visitors in 1970
93,212 visitors in 1990
101,609 visitors in 2000

Table 5 – State Parks

\$ - State Trail pass required on some/all miles * - trails in miles	City	Phone	Acres	Campsites	Camping Reservations	Winter Camping	Handicap accessible picnicking	Handicap accessible camping	Nature Center	Naturalist Programs	Vistas	Shoreline	Canoeing	Boat Launch	Fishing	Self-guided nature trails*	Hiking trails*	Mountain bike trails*	Cross-country ski trails*
Merrick State Park	Fountain City	(608)687-4936	297	67	Y		Y	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		2		3
Perrot State Park	Trempealeau	(608)534-6409	1270	98	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	1	15	7\$	9

What the WDNR Is Doing

Each state park in the system is staffed with park managers, rangers, and park maintenance staff (usually limited term employees).

This group runs the interpretive centers and work with Friends groups to coordinate educational activities related to the resources of the park. They enforce the rules of the park with things like campground and trail passes. The staff works on trail and campground maintenance as needed throughout the year for various recreational users. It is their role to make sure that facilities in the park meet the needs of the users while maintaining the integrity of the natural resources.

Sometimes challenges to maintenance occur. For example, in the spring of 2001, high flood levels on the Mississippi River brought up the level of the backwater in Merrick State Park. Park staff worked hard to make sure that park users were safe and when the water receded, they restored the shoreline campsites to useable quality.

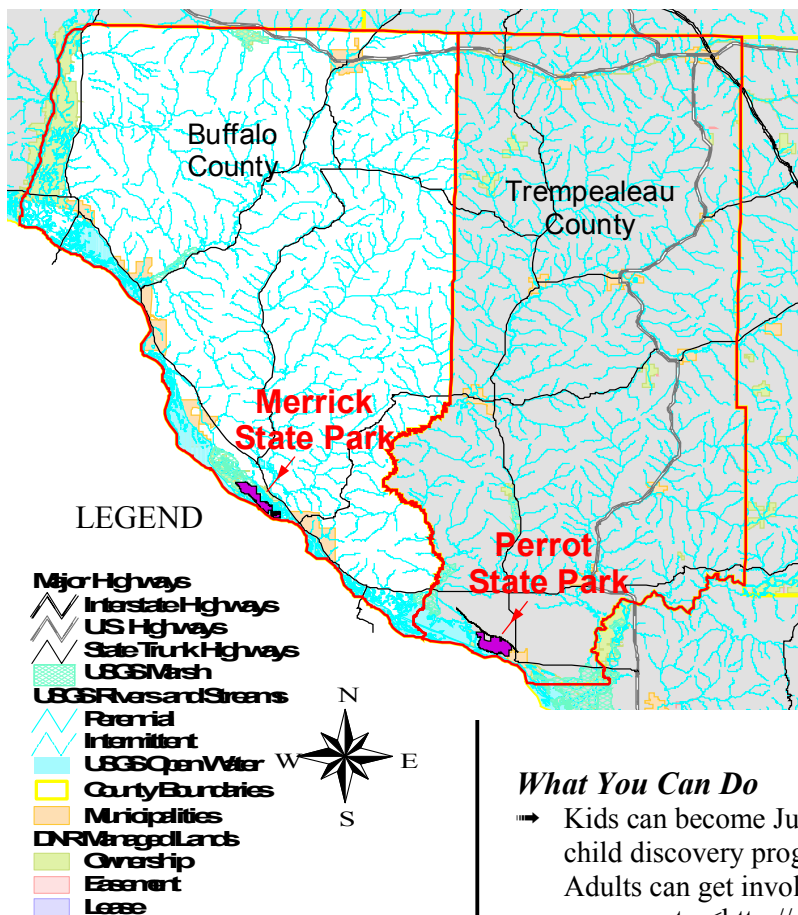


Figure 15– State Parks in the BBT

What You Can Do

- ➡ Kids can become Junior Rangers/Wisconsin Explorers, parent-child discovery programs in Wisconsin's state parks and forests. Adults can get involved as teachers/group leaders too. To find out more, go to <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/interp/jrwe.html>>, write to Bureau of Parks and Recreation, Department of Natural Resources, PO Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707, or call (608) 266-0229.
- ➡ Become a nature center host, a volunteer conservationist, or a visitor services volunteer. To find out more, visit <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/voljobs/volunt.htm>>.
- ➡ Join or help form a Friends group. To learn more, go to <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/voljobs/friends.html>> or the Friends of Wisconsin State Parks web page at <<http://www.wistateparkfriends.org>>.
- ➡ Become a bird-watcher with the Perrot State Park bird list. Pick up your copy at the park office.
- ➡ Check out Castle Mound Park. Because it is part of the Black River State Forest, it is not listed separately like the other parks. Call (715) 284-4103.
- ➡ Don't forget your county parks and forests. Visit <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/partners/coparks.html>> or call your county Forestry and Parks or Parks and Recreation department.

Trails

Trails in Wisconsin serve many purposes. They commemorate sites of historical significance like the Ice Age Trail. They frequently create natural connections between public lands for wildlife and humans alike. For example, the snowmobile and ATV trails of Jackson County are considered a gateway to the trails network further north. But most of all, they are sites of recreation for many thousands of people every year. These trails can take many forms from railroad beds to woodland paths to river trails.

In the BBT, there are two kinds of trails. The first is public trails found on state lands like wildlife and fishery areas, state parks, and forests. Public trail uses in this category include ATV, snowmobile, hiking, horse, mountain bike, and more. Almost any sport that requires a trail can find one on public land in this basin.

The second category is that of public trails that are themselves the classification of public land. Two such trails can be found in the basin – the Great River State Trail and the Buffalo River State Trail. Not to be forgotten is the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, which crosses the basin at its northern tip in Taylor County.

The 36 miles of the Buffalo River State Trail open a path between farms, woods, hills, marshland, and the Buffalo River itself. This multi-use trail in west central Wisconsin winds its way a former railroad grade from Fairchild to Mondovi in Trempealeau and Buffalo Counties. Hike, mountain bike (trail rated easy), ride horseback, snowmobiles, or ATVs, or cross-country ski this scenic route.

The Great River State Trail is a 24-mile stretch following the bed of the former Chicago & Northwestern Railroad. The railroad, built in the late 1800s, was sold in 1985 to the WDNR. The WDNR then transformed the property into a hiking and biking trail for summer and a snowmobiling, cross country skiing, and hiking trail in winter.

The trail, which opened officially in 1988, crosses over and through prairies and river bottomlands of the Mississippi, Black, and Trempealeau Rivers. Twenty bridges span waterways along the route, including a 287-foot steel railroad trestle crossing the delta of the Black River. Fishing is allowed along the trail in both summer and winter. Other activities include photography and wildlife or bird watching. Wetland wildlife and migrational birds are plentiful, as are other familiar creatures like deer, fox, and raccoons.

The Buffalo River State Trail attracted:

31,580 visitors in 1990
28,960 visitors in 1995
39,280 visitors in 2000

The Great River State Trail attracted:

40,000 visitors in 1990
23,200 visitors in 1995
65,572 visitors in 2000

Table 6 – State Trails

	City	Phone	Acres	Camping	Vistas	Canoeing	Boat launch	Fishing	Hiking*	Biking*	Snowmobiling*	XC Country Skiing*
▲ Located nearby \$ Requires trail pass * Trails in miles												
Buffalo River State Trail	Fairchild-Mondovi	(715)839-1607	418					Y	36	36	36	36
Great River State Trail	Onalaska-Marshland	(608)534-6409	256	▲	Y	Y	Y	Y	24	24\$	21	24

About 100 miles of hiking trails can be found on state land in the BBT. Add to that trails on county lands as well as hundreds more trail miles for horseback riding, motorbike, snowmobile, ATV, mountain bike, snowshoeing, and skiing.

What the WDNR Is Doing

With so many different uses in a limited amount of space, conflicts can arise. To avoid user conflicts, especially those between silent sports and motorized sports, restrictions must be placed on trail use. Frequently, multi-use trails are created and must be used at different times of the year by different users to avoid conflicts. This limits the amount of time any one group can spend on the trails, but it allows for greater enjoyment and safety on those trails for each group. Occasionally, other restrictions are imposed when users stray from the trail and damage the environment. When users do not respect trail rules, trails can be closed for the protection of the surrounding natural resources.

There is, of course, more to the WDNR's involvement than regulation though. WDNR staff spend many hours making sure that public trails are passable for different purposes by clearing trees and debris after storms, grooming trails for winter sports, posting trails, and more, for every season of the year. With so many miles of trails though, the job of grooming and maintaining all of them would be too much for only a few staff members, so the help of volunteers, frequently through conservation or recreational organizations, is always welcome.

Another job of the WDNR is the on-going purchase of land and/or easements for trails and other public lands. Individual offices designate project boundaries for areas that they would like to protect or that they view as high-quality recreation areas. If the project area is approved, then WDNR real estate staff members begin working toward purchasing land or easements within the project boundary. They do this by watching the properties in the project area for landowners that are ready to sell and purchasing the land, if possible, at fair market value. Depending on the size of the designated area, this can be a long process, but after years of hard work, when a trail is finally groomed for use, it is always worth it.

What You Can Do

- ➡ Check out the Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation Calendar for upcoming events at <<http://www.iceagetrail.org/infocenter/>>.
- ➡ Join the Friends of the Great River State Trail to help promote, advertise, and enhance the Great River State Trail in cooperation with the WDNR. To join, write to Friends of the Great River State Trail, 800 Oak Forest Drive, Onalaska, WI 54650.
- ➡ Participate in the Black River State Forest Trail Foundation – 311 View Street, Tomah, WI 54660 or call (608) 372-6901.
- ➡ Adopt a trail. To find out more, visit <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/voljobs/volunt.htm>>.
- ➡ Join or help form a Friends group. To learn more, go to <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/voljobs/friends.html>>.
- ➡ Canoeists, check out Voyageurs Canoe Trail in Perrot State Park. For more information, call the park office at (608) 534-6409.
- ➡ Hit the trails!!!

Help celebrate the Year of the Trails in 2002. There will be trail activities and community events for everyone. To learn more, visit <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/trails/yot.html>>.

Boating

Boating is a fun form of recreation for thousands of users in the BBT every year, and there are plenty of places to go boating. Lakes, streams, and the Mississippi River provide unique and often scenic places to get out on the water. Boating affords other fun and exciting possibilities including fishing, water skiing, inner tubing, and simply getting out for a day in the sun.

All of this fun and excitement come with many dangers and rules to protect against those dangers. There must be enough personal flotation devices (PFDs) for every passenger, especially for children, who can drown in five minutes even if an adult is nearby. Just like for driving on the road, there are rules about alcohol consumption for the driver of the boat. Some waterbodies even have rules that do not allow motorized boats or personal watercrafts on them.

In addition, there are a lot of different users on the water for boaters to look out for. Canoes, kayaks, sailboats, personal watercrafts, swimmers, anglers, and anchored boats can all be found on the water and can frequently be difficult to see if drivers are not paying attention. These other uses should be respected for everyone's safety and enjoyment. This means steering clear of swimming areas, smaller watercrafts, and places where people are fishing.

Boating is a sport where common sense and paying attention to the surroundings can keep everybody safe, and that is the most important thing. In the year 2000, there were 93 injuries and 25 fatalities due to boating accidents. These accidents, in most cases, could have been avoided.

It will be easier to learn how to avoid these accidents in the near future. Many coordinators are moving safety education courses into the future by computerizing them. Hunter education has been on CD-ROM for about four years, and snowmobile safety education coordinators are developing a CD-ROM training program. An exam or a day in the field follows these so students can confirm their new knowledge and skills.

Boating education coordinators have also been looking for a way to provide an alternative to the classroom style of safety education. As society becomes busier and busier, it becomes harder to make time once every week for several weeks. Because boating education is so important, coordinators are looking for a way to present the course in a more convenient format. For boating education, coordinators are looking into developing an internet-based home study course. Adults can work through the course at their leisure and take an exam at the end. Coordinators hope that this convenience translates into safer, more educated boaters.

In Wisconsin, there are over 15,000 inland lakes, and 43,000 miles of rivers. The Black-Buffalo-Trempealeau River Basin contains about 80 lakes and flowages and about 3500 miles of navigable streams.



Canoeist under a ledge on the Black River.

In the year 2000 on Wisconsin waters, out of 148 accidents involving 204 watercraft, about:

- 54% of boating accidents happened while the boat(s) were cruising.
- 23% of boating accidents happened while users were water skiing or innertubing.
- 14% of boating accidents happened while users were fishing.

The other 9% of accidents were results of commercial incidents, diving or swimming, racing, starting the engine, and whitewater sports.

119 boating accidents involved uneducated boaters.

Figure 16 – Boating Markers Quiz;
Know your boating markers. What do these markers mean? (Answers below)



a.



b.



c.



d.

Answers: a. Danger; b. Controlled Area;
c. Informational; d. Boaters Keep Out

What the WDNR Is Doing

Considering the amount of recreation that takes place on the water and the number of boating accidents that happen because an uneducated driver is steering a boat, boating safety education courses are the obvious place to start. The courses are available through the Bureau of Law Enforcement. Individuals ten years or older are eligible to take the course, which lasts a minimum of eight hours and currently costs only ten dollars. A small price to pay to save a boat or a life.

On the subject of paying a price, the WDNR also offers advice to potential boat buyers. Buying a boat is not something that people do every day, and it can be a little different than buying a couch or a car. Future buyers have a lot of things to think about before making a purchase, like storage, extra costs related to boats, and boat maintenance considerations. The WDNR wants buyers to keep in mind things like registration and tricks that can be played on boat buyers.

To make boating available to the public, the WDNR owns and maintains numerous boat landings across the basin. It is important to provide these landings so the public has easy, safe access to the rivers and lakes in the area. These may be broad cement or gravel landings that are part of a park, or they may be nothing more than an easement with a canoe landing on it. However, they all provide a chance for the public to experience the basin's waterways first hand.

Time spent both at boat landings and on the water requires everyone to follow rules for safety. For boaters who choose not to follow the regulations laid out for safe boating, wardens are regularly in the field checking registrations, monitoring speeds, looking for personal flotation devices, and generally watching to make sure that users are being considerate of others. Two hundred forty-five boating intoxicated incidents were cited and boating fines in Jackson County totaled almost \$3000 in the year 2000. Law enforcement is present to make sure that everyone's boating experience is safe and fun.

What You Can Do

- If you have not taken one already, take a boating safety course. To see a schedule and learn more about courses, go to <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/es/enforcement/safety/boated.htm>>.
- Visit the Boating section of the WDNR Law Enforcement web site at <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/es/enforcement/safety/boatpape.htm>>. It provides valuable information to make your boating experience a safe one. Things that you can access on this page include:
 - Information about buying and registering a boat
 - Boating regulations
 - Identifying waterway markers
 - Safety tips
 - Age requirements
- Remember the WDNR Hotline – 1-800-TIP-WDNR – if you see someone violating boating rules and making the water unsafe for others.

Hunting

More than almost any other sport, hunting offers a wide range of options. In Wisconsin, it is legal to hunt nine different types of birds and more than 15 different species of fur-bearing mammals. Depending on the game, hunting can take place during any season in any number of settings like open fields, woods, wetlands, on public or private land. Hunters have their choice of weapons – different types of guns, bow and arrow, slingshot – and can use trained dogs to help. Hunting is for the young and old and can be shared between generations. The techniques and skills required are endless.

So are the responsibilities. Obviously hunting can be dangerous. Weapons as well as wild animals, especially injured ones, must be respected. Most hunters know this and follow the rules that have been laid out, because they know that those rules are there to protect their safety and that of those who may be around them.

The rules protect more than just the hunters though. They protect a viable, huntable species. They are written to control the populations of wild species, and they also prevent over-hunting of species that are in trouble. For example, many hunting seasons avoid times when species are mating or nesting. At the same time, some other seasons are year-round because a species is overabundant.

People come to the BBT from all over Wisconsin and neighboring states for its wildlife and hunting opportunities. They act as population control. They add to the economic well being of the entire area. And as long as hunters want to hunt in the basin, the Bureau of Wildlife Management will continue to manage wildlife for the recreational interests of all.

The T-zone deer hunts before and after the regular hunting season can be a source of frustration and confusion for those that do not understand how and why they are planned. The purpose of the T-zone hunt is to provide an opportunity to harvest only antlerless deer and thereby control the deer population. T-zones are chosen based on several factors, including, but not limited to, whether two years of traditional hunting can lower the population to within 20% of the goal, and agricultural damage and vehicle collision statistics.

For some hunters, the reasons for hunting are changing from feeding families to getting a trophy buck. Some are becoming more selective and only taking large bucks, leaving does and smaller bucks behind.

Ways of thinking about deer hunting are changing too from earlier in the century when the deer population was extremely small and doe hunting was not allowed. Now hunters are coming to understand that with the deer population as high as it is, doe hunting is the best form of control. If there are too many does, the population will grow and few of the highly desirable bucks will make it to adulthood, much less “trophy” status. T-zone hunts are part of this new way of thinking about deer management (Kastler, 2001).

Wildlife that can legally be hunted or trapped in Wisconsin:

- Ruffed grouse
- Bobwhite quail
- Sharp-tailed grouse
- Pheasant
- Woodcock
- Wild Turkey
- Crow
- Canada Goose
- Hungarian partridge
- White-tailed deer
- Jackrabbit & Cottontail rabbit
- Squirrel, gray or fox
- Raccoon
- Black bear
- Coyote
- Fox (all species)
- Beaver
- Mink
- Muskrat
- Bobcat, Otter, Fisher
- Opossum, Skunk, Weasel, Snowshoe hare



Courtesy of Michele Kastler

A ring-necked pheasant released in a Jackson County wildlife area.

Currently, the deer population is about 40 deer per square mile. The goal for the population is 25 deer per square mile.

The BBT had about 25 wildlife damage claims in the year 2000, with damages totaling nearly \$50,000.

Deer caused most of these damages, though geese, bears, and turkeys caused some damage as well.

In the year 2000 in the BBT, nearly 500 deer were donated to help feed the poor. That was over 26,000 pounds of venison for the hungry.

What the WDNR Is Doing

The WDNR's primary role in the realm of hunting is two-fold. It includes offering opportunities for recreation and providing the information that people need to take advantage of those opportunities in a safe and enjoyable way.

Local wildlife staff members work hard throughout the year to track populations of huntable and non-huntable species. For example, every year they use statistical data to estimate the population of the deer herd to determine when and where T-zone hunts should be held and how many licenses should be sold overall. Similar surveys using harvest data, vehicle collisions, crop damages, and more are done for turkeys and bears and other highly desirable species for hunting.

The WDNR also partners with the Wildlife Damage Abatement and Claims Program (WDACP) to provide compensation to farmers whose crops are damaged by wildlife. Farmers who report damage, usually a result of deer, geese, bears, or turkeys, can be reimbursed up to 75% of the cost of their damages. Programs like these help to create a balance between recreational needs, negative impacts on farmers, and the needs of wildlife.

The wildlife staff makes other opportunities available to the public as well. For example, special permits are available to people with disabilities so they can hunt from a stationary vehicle or use a crossbow. Also, related to the WDACP, farmers whose crops are damaged by wild animals can receive special permits to hunt those animals out of season to protect their fields.

To promote hunting safety, the WDNR begins with safety courses. By taking these courses, hunters can get off to a good start by understanding hunting rules, knowing how to dress out animals after the kill, and in general, learning the safe way to go about shooting their first animal. Bow hunting safety and trapping courses are also available.

What You Can Do

- ➡ Know the rules of hunting before you go out into the field, the woods, or the wetland. Take a hunter safety course in your area. To see a schedule of courses, visit <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/es/enforcement/safety/upcoming.htm>>.
- ➡ Find out when the seasons are for any animal you want to hunt. Visit your local WDNR service center or any facility that sells Wisconsin hunting licenses.
- ➡ Order your hunting (or fishing) license in advance on-line or by phone. Visit <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us>> and click on "Licenses, Permits and Registrations" or call 1-877-WI-LICENSE.
- ➡ Donate legally harvested deer at designated sites to help feed the poor. Brochures are available wherever hunting licenses are sold. In the BBT, donation sites can be found in Buffalo, Clark, La Crosse, Monroe, Taylor, and Trempealeau Counties.
- ➡ Teachers, take a look at wildlife publications available for your use. For a list of publications, visit <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/publ/teachers.htm>>.
- ➡ Keep the traditions alive! Take a kid hunting.

Camping

Camping is truly an activity for everyone. Campers can travel to the site by canoe, on foot, by horse, or on wheels. They can stay in anything from an RV to a tent, or simply sleep out under the stars. Maybe some like to fish for their dinner and only carry matches in case the flint doesn't work, and others like to bring along a lighter and all the fixings for s'mores. Some will only camp in the summer, and others thrive on winter camping. The options are endless depending on each individual's style of "roughing it."

Any of these opportunities are possible in state parks and forests in the Black-Buffer-Trempealeau River Basin. In the Black River State Forest, Merrick State Park, and Perrot State Park, visitors can go canoe camping, backpack camping, or camping from their car. They can stay in sites at the water's edge or deep in the woods. There are electrical hookups for those who want to use them and water pumps, showers, and dumping stations in the campgrounds. Group camping, horse camping, and handicapped access camping is available. There are no public campgrounds located on the Buffalo River State Trail or the Great River State Trail, but the brochure for the latter includes information about nearby private campgrounds. In wildlife areas, natural areas, and fishery areas, because there are few or no facilities on the land, do not encourage and sometimes do not allow camping. However, some primitive sites can be found.

Of course, there is a nightly fee for camping in state parks and forests. There are also rules to be followed regarding noise, fire use, trash disposal, and pets. At the more remote campsites, the idea of "pack in, pack out" is very important. When dumping stations are not available, campers should plan on taking with them everything that they brought to the site, including trash. It is important to follow these rules to be considerate of neighboring campers and future campers and for the safety and enjoyment of all in the campground.

Historically, it has not been easy for people with disabilities to get out and enjoy the great outdoors. However, more recently, great strides have been made to make outdoor recreational experiences more accessible to more people. One area that is improving is in handicapped accessible camping facilities.

The group camp in the Black River State Forest is ADA compliant. This means working within the boundaries of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, with ramps leading into the group camp building and wheelchair accessible bathrooms and shower stalls.

Also, at Castle Mound Park, located in the state forest, an ADA compliant campsite with electricity is available. The site is paved and has an accessible bathroom nearby. During the upcoming Black River State Forest master planning process, more handicapped accessible campsites will possibly be planned for addition (Beyer, 2001).

Studies show that in state forests:

- ➔ Campers most often go camping in summer.
- ➔ High percentages of campers prefer camping on state lands.
- ➔ Campers place great importance on things like solitude and diversity of wildlife.

— Olson, *et al*

There are 263 designated campsites on state land in the BBT. Some, but not all, require reservations.

What the WDNR Is Doing

The WDNR regularly assesses the needs for camping facilities on public lands. For example, with the master planning process coming up for the Black River State Forest, the staff is considering what amenities will make the camping experience better, whether it be adding more remote campsites for hiking or canoeing or installing electricity or water at more sites. In addition, they will be considering visitors' ease in getting to campsites as they look at the condition of their trails and roads leading into the forest. To make these decisions,

they look at things like annual demand for facilities, condition of current facilities, and available funding. More importantly, they listen to people who use the facilities to find out what is lacking and how it can be made better. Similar planning processes occur in state parks as well.

As described in the State Parks section of this report, park and forest crews work very hard to make sure campgrounds are well maintained. They care for the roads leading to campsites, and they make sure that campsites are clean and have all of the amenities that they are supposed to have, like an enclosed fire pit and picnic table (at certain sites).

Park and forest rangers can be found on site to ensure a comfortable experience for visitors. They enforce the rules of the campground so campers

are safe and not disturbing others' enjoyment of the experience. Rangers are also able to answer questions that campers may have about the facilities and nearby recreational opportunities and can help visitors make the most of their time in the park or forest.



Courtesy of Mark Gawron

Canoe campsites found on the Black River.

What You Can Do

- ➡ Everything you want to know about camping in state parks and forests and more. Visit <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/reservation/index.html>>.
- ➡ Maps and specific information about backpack camping, canoe camping, horse camping, hunter camping, and general camping in the Black River State Forest are available at the Black River Falls WDNR Service Center, located at the intersection of Highway 54 and Interstate 94.
- ➡ Become a volunteer campground host. To find out more, visit <<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/voljobs/volunt.htm>>.
- ➡ Private campgrounds are also available everywhere in the basin. Visit the Wisconsin Association of Campground Owners web page <<http://www.wisconsincampgrounds.com/>>.
- ➡ If you would like to have more handicapped accessible campsites available in the Black River State Forest, plan on taking part in the Black River State Forest master planning process, which will begin in 2003.

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